

1.0 Introduction: Study Objectives and Technical Approach

Washington, DC draws visitors to experience American heritage, culture, and the dynamics of current-day democracy in a setting of majesty and grace befitting a great nation. The tourism and hospitality industry serving these visitors accounts for close to 20 percent of the total workforce in metropolitan Washington.¹ Tourism, therefore, is a vital force in the local economy and tour buses, which have been estimated to serve as many as one-third of the visitors to Washington's historical and cultural attractions, perform a function crucial to both the economic life of the city and its role as the nation's capital.²

The benefits related to tour bus operations currently come at a significant cost, however. Large numbers of tour buses contribute to traffic congestion on the roadways serving the District and its environs. Several factors compound the adverse traffic impacts associated with tour bus operations. Providing adequate parking supplies suitable for accommodating tour buses is difficult, because the destinations most frequently visited by tour buses are located in a high-density area where parking space is at a premium. Loading/unloading space at major points of interest also is constrained, resulting in queuing of motor coaches and obstruction of traffic flows.

In addition to traffic problems, tour buses are perceived as objectionable at times because they may obscure sight lines and view corridors, particularly when several are lined up in one place, forming a "wall of buses" around the District's famous landmarks. Another concern is that diesel fumes emitted by tour buses contribute to air pollution, in a metropolitan area determined to be in severe non-attainment for ozone by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The extra mileage and congestion resulting from tour buses searching for scarce parking and boarding spaces compound the air pollution problem. Tour bus "cruising"—instead of parking between stops—also raises the risk of traffic accidents, including potentially dangerous conflicts with pedestrians. Moreover, neighborhoods frequently complain of tour buses intruding into residential areas, where the air pollution caused by tour bus idling is viewed as one of several critical problems, in addition to tour bus-generated noise, traffic, safety risks, illegal parking, and visual blight, and wear and tear on residential roadways.

The objective of the District of Columbia *Tour Bus Management Initiative* is to develop a plan that will ameliorate the long-standing problems, as identified above, that negatively affect tour bus operations as well as traffic conditions, the visitor experience, and the environment in the city. The *Initiative* is undertaken by five member organizations:

- National Capital Planning Commission
- District of Columbia Department of Transportation
- Downtown DC Business Improvement District
- Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation

¹ District of Columbia Department of Housing and Economic Development, *The Economic Resurgence of Washington, DC*, Chapter 2, November 1998.

² Source: interview with tour bus industry representative

- Office of DC Councilmember Sharon Ambrose

This report presents the results of a study performed by the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center for the *Tour Bus Management Initiative*. The study has consisted of an assessment of the problems associated with tour bus operations in the District of Columbia and analysis of potential solutions to those problems. The report is intended to identify the component elements of a tour bus management plan for the District of Columbia.

The study was based on three major sources of information:³

- a review of best practices in North American and European cities
- interviews with tour bus operators and other stakeholders whose interests are affected by tour buses
- field observation of tour bus operations and impacts in the District.

Tour buses are operated by private businesses and since the deregulation of private motor carriers in 1982, local government agencies have not maintained data that can be used to quantify tour bus operations. Therefore, the current rough estimates of tour bus market characteristics discussed in this report, including the size, distribution, and seasonality of tour bus activity in the District, are based on stakeholder interviews rather than government or industry data. As part of this study, the Volpe Center has prepared a plan for a tour bus counting effort that will provide the information needed to quantify tour bus market characteristics more precisely. (The bus count plan is presented in Appendix A). This data collection effort, if funded, could be sponsored by the District Department of Transportation. An important issue is whether such a study would be cost-effective and inexpensively replicated over time to obtain information about tour bus trends and the success of various management techniques. The earliest possible survey conducted would be during the Spring of 2004.

³ The observations and analysis presented in this report may be enhanced and supplemented by the tour bus counts to be obtained through the planned data collection effort. The report findings do not depend to a significant degree, however, on detailed market data